



News Release

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Provincial Health Services Authority
BC Children's Hospital
Ministry of Health

BC Children's Hospital wants families to make safety a top priority for the holidays

Vancouver – The Trauma Department at BC Children's Hospital (BCCH) is reminding parents and families to take simple steps this holiday season to reduce the risk of ending up in the emergency room.

"Choking and swallowing small objects are frequent reasons for emergency room injury visits," said Lisa Widas, Manager of the Trauma Program at BCCH. Widas says incidents of choking happen all year, but with the toys and decorations that come with the December holidays, parents and other caregivers need to be extra vigilant.

"We see about 15 to 20 choking or accidental swallowing-related hospitalizations every December, and they can have severe health impacts," said Widas. "For example, if a child swallows button batteries, they can cause serious internal burns. Magnets will be attracted to each other right through body tissue and can cause severe internal injuries as well."

Widas recommends parents and gift-givers carefully check safety labels to ensure appropriate age recommendations, promptly discard of broken toys and popped balloons, and be sure to keep toys for older children away from their younger siblings. As a general rule, if a piece from a toy, or the toy itself, can fit through a toilet paper roll, it could fit into a young child's mouth and cause choking.

Other holiday safety tips

- **Christmas trees:** Keep trees well watered and avoid fires by placing far enough away from heat sources like fireplaces and heaters. Use LED lights which emit less heat and keep strings of lights away from children to avoid strangulation;
- **Candles and matches:** Keep lit candles off of table cloths which a child could pull down. Place lit menorahs on a high surface and not too close to the edge of a table or shelf.
- **Fireplaces:** The glass of a gas fireplace heats up to 200°C (400°F) in just six minutes, and takes 45 minutes to cool down. Stay close when a child is in the room and block the

fireplace with a hearth gate or screen that bolts into or around your fireplace, or put a safety gate in the doorway to the room with the fireplace.

Dr. Ash Singhal, pediatric neurosurgeon and Director of the Pediatric Trauma Program at BCCH, advises using overall precaution during the winter season.

“We all want to enjoy the holidays, but make safety a part of your planning, whether it’s around your home, outdoors or on the road,” said Singhal. “At BC Children’s, we have seen many holiday season tragedies that might have been avoided with a little more patience and caution. Planning ahead can help everyone enjoy this festive time of year.”

BC Children’s Hospital is part of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), a specialist in prevention. PHSA is committed to sharing expertise and knowledge to promote health and prevent illness and injury, manage chronic conditions, and lessen the burden of disease in high risk populations.

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